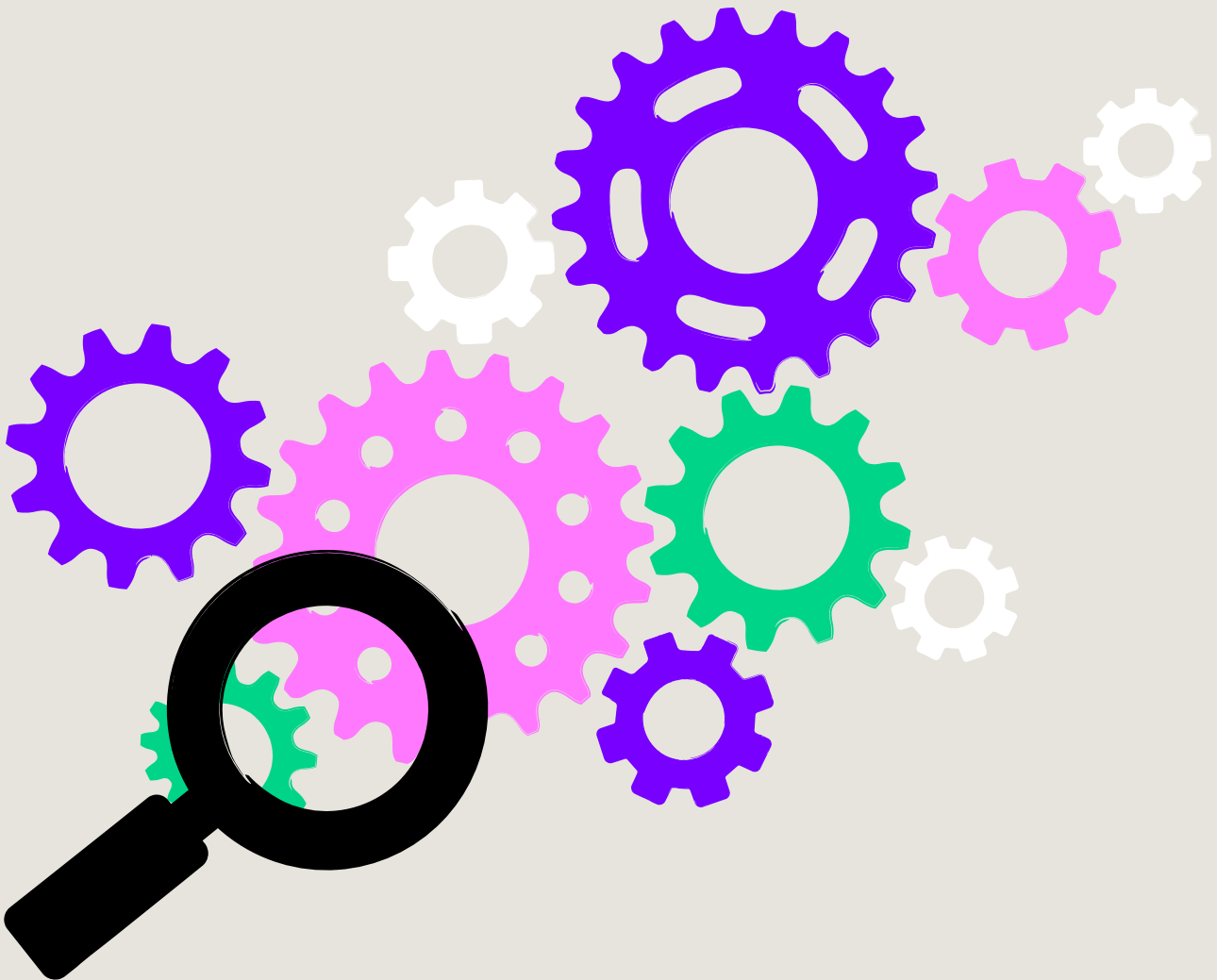


STATEWIDE
PREVENTION WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Summary Evaluation Report 2023–2024



Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

ABOUT THE STATEWIDE PROGRAM AND THIS REPORT

Safe and Equal delivers the multi-year Statewide Prevention Workforce Development Program (Statewide Program) for Victoria's primary prevention of family and gender-based violence workforce. The Statewide Program is a wrap-around package of learning and support activities that commenced in 2021 and is due for completion in 2026. The Statewide Program offers professional and skills development opportunities, along with opportunities that support connection and collaboration, to practitioners involved in primary prevention across the state. Safe and Equal receives funding from the Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing (2022–2026) and Department of Education (2021–2025) to deliver the Statewide Program. Funding from the Department of Education has now been extended to 2028.

The Statewide Program has an accompanying multi-year Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework (MEL Framework). The MEL Framework supports Safe and Equal in collecting meaningful data in a timely manner for continuous real-time learning and improvement, and to determine the reach, quality and impact of the Statewide Program. Safe and Equal staff lead all data collection, analysis and sense making for the evaluation of the Statewide Program.

This report contains a snapshot of activities and outputs for the 12-month period, July 2023 to June 2024. It presents selected evaluation findings arising from evaluation activity conducted for Year 3.¹ It includes staff reflections on what's working well and what could be improved, before a short conclusion and an outline of next steps for the year to come.

¹ For Year 3, Safe and Equal was joined by Lirata Consulting (until December 2023) and WLK Consulting (from February 2024) for external technical assistance and mentoring throughout the evaluation process.

SNAPSHOT OF ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

This year, Safe and Equal delivered on all core components of the Statewide Program while ensuring all activities continued to meet the learning and support needs of Victoria's evolving prevention workforce. A snapshot of activities and outputs is illustrated as follows.

Figure 1: Program delivery highlights



SELECTED EVALUATION FINDINGS

Workforce engagements remain strong

This year, Safe and Equal facilitated the engagement of 5,200+ participants in various Statewide Program activities: from the [PreventX 2024 national conference](#) 'Messaging for a Movement,' to the expertly run [Communities of Practice \(CoPs\)](#) and [training offerings](#), to the electronic practice network (Basecamp) and monthly e-bulletins for [Partners in Prevention \(PiP\)](#) members. This figure reflects an almost 24% increase from last year's total engagements (see the [summary evaluation report for 2022–2023](#)).

The online national conference attracted just over 390 participants from across Victoria and Australia over its two days duration (19 and 20 March 2024). The conference involved 68 speakers in a program that featured a mix of deep dive plenaries, panel discussions and workshops – something for everyone. Recordings have been uploaded and are available to view 'on demand' until March 2025, further extending the conference reach and amplifying the theme of messaging for a movement. The conference event on 21 March in Melbourne attracted 111 participants, demonstrating an enthusiasm for opportunities to gather face-to-face from Victorian practitioners and other stakeholders.

The CoPs continued to build on Safe and Equal's [longstanding engagement](#) with the prevention workforce through this 'tried and tested' mechanism of learning and support. Safe and Equal convened five CoPs with a combined total of 74 members, consistent with the reach in 2022–2023. With the exception of one CoP, all CoPs commenced and concluded for the 2023–2024 period covered by this summary document.

- + Resistance in Gender Equality and Primary Prevention
- + Respectful Relationships and Schools-based Prevention Programs
- + Early Career Practitioners
- + Regional and Rural Practitioners
- + Partnerships CoP (concluded November 2024)

Safe and Equal delivered 12 online training sessions to 172 participants through courses or single session offerings. These were either existing offerings or new offerings developed for delivery this year.

- + Prevention in Practice (existing)
- + Unpacking Resistance (existing)
- + Responding to Disclosures in Prevention (new)
- + Small Steps: Bystander action for equality (new)

Safe and Equal's high-quality primary prevention resources continued to be sought after and accessed by practitioners in the field. Four resources were released in response to the workforce learning and support needs identified via the Statewide Program. These resources were either substantial revisions or updates to previous versions on the themes being covered, or freshly developed resources in their own right.

- + [Fast Facts on Family and Gender-based Violence](#) (revised)
- + [Driving Change: Taking action against the drivers of family and gender-based violence](#) (revised)
- + [Overcoming Resistance and Backlash: A guide for primary prevention practitioners](#) (new)
- + [PreventX: Messaging for a movement. Tips and insights for messaging and advocacy to address the drivers of family and gender-based violence](#) (new)

PiP membership grew to 3,696 members, reflecting an increase of 20% on last year. Safe and Equal continued to send out monthly e-bulletins to around 3,700 subscribers and host the Basecamp for almost 500 active users.

Participant profile reflects what is known about the workforce

Most practitioners engaging with the Statewide Program during the year identified as female, reflecting the demographic of prevention and response workforces and the community and health services sectors more broadly (where most prevention practitioners are from). That said, Safe and Equal is pleased to see that practitioners engaging with the Statewide Program are diversifying – particularly in relation to people working in settings outside of those historically associated with the organisation. The continued strong engagement from school and early childhood practitioners and community and family violence services, indicate the relevance of the Statewide Program to settings traditionally connected to Safe and Equal. This year, however, Safe and Equal observed an increased engagement from practitioners working in university and TAFE settings, and the sports, recreation and leisure settings.

In terms of other characteristics, Safe and Equal observed that the majority of practitioners involved in the Statewide Program (62%) have been working in primary prevention for not more than five years, with over one-third (37%) having worked in the field for less than two years. Overall, this career-stage profile of participants remains consistent with last year's profile, and reflects a slightly higher figure to what is known about the prevention workforce more broadly. For instance, last primary prevention workforce census was released in 2021, and found that most practitioners are fairly new to the field with 54% of survey respondents having been in their role for less than five years.

Opportunities to connect and collaborate are highly valued

This year, practitioners working across a range of sectors, settings, organisations and communities continued to value opportunities afforded through the Statewide Program to share experiences and connect with one another. Safe and Equal found that activities generated positive impacts on professional identity and wellbeing too. These findings were especially notable for the CoPs.

Data collected through routinely administered feedback forms show that an overwhelming majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements related to the experiential dimension of CoP participation.

- + CoPs are safe spaces to share practice challenges and successes (94%)
- + CoPs have helped strengthened connections with other practitioners (95%)

The Case Study showcased in this year's report provides more depth to the story behind these numbers, with a focus on prevention practitioners working in settings in regional and rural Victoria. The Case Study describes how the CoPs forged valuable connections with like-minded professionals; validated the sense of a professional identity; generated solidarity among those tasked with whole-of-organisation change agendas; amplified the practitioner voice; helped with gaining traction for primary prevention; and offered a professional lifeline, or a reminder of 'why I'm doing this work ... and want to be doing this work.'



CASE STUDY: COPS IN REGIONAL AND RURAL CONTEXTS

Safe and Equal has a longstanding commitment to workforce development through building practitioner capabilities, connections and wellbeing. Primary prevention CoPs are central to this strategy. These CoPs bring together people involved in prevention activities in everyday settings like local governments and schools, and offer structured opportunities to identify challenges, exchange practice know-how or tools, and 'troubleshoot' in real world, real-time contexts. Crucially, CoPs offer members the space and time for peer learning through the experience of being expertly held in conversation and reflection, and in safety and solidarity. Adult learning is experiential, and with experiential learning comes greater connection and wellbeing.

This case study focuses on the reach and value of Safe and Equal's primary prevention CoPs to workers located in regional and rural Victoria. It builds on the reflections of two practitioners who have come to prevention work for the first time in their professional lives. Alice* is an early career professional working in a local government. Tracey* is a mid-career professional with experience in family violence response, homelessness services and other direct service provision, currently working with schools.

One other commonality between Alice and Tracey is the focus of their work on whole-of-organisation change within their settings for prevention. For Alice, that means working with local government staff, leadership and the wider community served by Council; for Tracey, that means working with teachers, administrators, students and the wider community of parents, services and agencies in local areas. Put simply, Alice and Tracey have big roles to play within their settings in regional and rural Victoria.

Validating our sense of professional identity

Alice and Tracey share commonalities with many others in the prevention field too, in being the only ones employed at their workplaces for their knowledge and skills in primary prevention. But the regional and rural contexts have the effect of intensifying this reality. Both practitioners have identified feeling like an 'impostor' at one point or other in undertaking their roles; both have expressed the need to connect with others like them to help them work through this mindset.

Alice joined Safe and Equal's Regional and Rural Practitioners CoP while Tracey was a member of the Respectful Relationships and Schools-based Prevention Programs CoP. They offered the following reflections on the CoPs, and what the CoPs have meant to them as lone practitioners in regional and rural contexts in terms of validating their professional identities.

I never imagined I'd be in this sort of work. I was finishing up my studies and thought I'd have to wait to be in a role like this. I'm a year and a half into the work, it's still only me, there is no team, and it's a small regional Council. The impostor syndrome is real. The CoP has been so validating throughout this time. Participating in the group with others who were feeling similar in their workplaces. Having opportunities to 'case study' the work I was planning. To talk about the roadblocks in getting leadership buy-in. All that helped build my confidence. It helped me to see that I do know what I'm doing. I'm now trusting myself more than before.

– Alice

Finding spaces where you can have those really rich conversations on family violence, trauma and social change, there's not a lot of opportunities for that. I wanted to connect with other people who had experiences like mine. When you're operating as a single person, you can discount yourself. What would I know? Imposter syndrome. To be able to say that you've run your idea past peers and they have supported it, means my manager can see the additional work. That it's not just me and I've sought input.

– Tracey

Spaces for solidarity and amplifying the practitioner voice

Sharing challenges, exchanging information and resources, and troubleshooting in the CoP environment has the added benefit of placing the 'weight' of primary prevention in the hands of an entire movement and lifting the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of isolated sole practitioners. Tracey and Alice spoke about this in different ways. Tracey noted the sense of solidarity that the CoP gave her, and from there the authorisation for her work. Alice spoke of the value of Safe and Equal's resources in helping to amplify her voice, which in turn helped to gain traction with resistant organisational leadership.

The CoP, professional learning and that ability to network with others makes the work a shared responsibility. If we didn't have access to these sorts of spaces and resources, it would put a lot of risk onto us as individuals. I'd be the one going into each school and saying these are the statistics, this is what you need to do, this is why there's pushback. But when there's a cohort of others like me, and organisations like Safe and Equal, Our Watch too, and when we're all doing the same messaging for prevention, then my work carries more weight. It's not just one person delivering messages into schools.

– Tracey

Getting leadership buy-in for prevention at my organisation has been difficult. Some things don't get approved because managers don't understand the role of misogyny in driving violence. It does feel like I'm pushing uphill from the bottom, and it has taken a lot out of me. But I've accessed resources through the CoP, and I've drawn on Safe and Equal's resources on their website too. I've created an internal SharePoint to support organisational understandings of the gendered drivers. This has helped me to speak with men on why and how to be agents for change. It's sparked greater accountability within the organisation. I've also developed a comprehensive family violence printed resource with a colleague in a neighbouring local government organisation. All this has given the work that I do greater visibility beyond me as a single practitioner.

– Alice

A professional lifeline and reminder of why we do the work

The value of CoPs to practitioner wellbeing was also not lost to Tracey and Alice. It is important to point out that prevention practitioners are not necessarily recipients of formal supervision as part of the job, which is quite different to their counterparts in family violence response or direct service roles. While CoPs are not established as therapeutic spaces, the opportunity for sharing and learning amongst peers in safety and solidarity can have a healing effect. Let's face it, prevention is incredibly hard work: it can trigger a lifetime of experiences of the intersecting structural drivers of violence, and indeed of the experience of violence itself. In this sense, CoPs are a professional lifeline.

The first meeting felt like a luxury. But then we realised that this is what we should be getting as practitioners. It's about scheduling the time for personal sharing about our prevention work that won't necessarily happen anywhere else. It's about allowing the personal sharing to be a professional discussion. The CoP has been a therapeutic space of sorts. I've always come away from it so grounded. And I'm still here, I'm healthily here.

– Tracey

I realise the CoP is not set up to be a therapeutic space. But we have to factor in that many of us working in primary prevention are likely to be victim survivors of violence, given the statistics. So, when we get resistance from organisational leaders, middle-aged white men with more organisational power than us, it's hard. The CoP felt like a space for accessing the supervision I needed but isn't afforded to us. It helped me through the challenges I was facing in my work. I could be me and turn up as me, instead of showing up and pretending to be a certain persona with a certain energy. It had direct relevance to my practice as well as to me as a practitioner. It built a lot of resilience in me.

– Alice

Tracey and Alice were asked to contribute some final thoughts on the CoPs and what these have meant to them as practitioners in regional and rural Victoria. Alice said, 'If it wasn't for Safe and Equal and the CoP, I would have been twisting in the wind for a lot longer.' Tracey said, 'The CoP has been a constant reminder of why I'm doing this work, and that I want to be doing this work. So, that's been massive.'

* Names have been changed to protect and maintain anonymity.

Positive shifts in knowledge and confidence continue

The Statewide Program continued to generate positive impacts on practitioner learning. During the year, many participants reported gains in knowledge in prevention practice and confidence for the work following their attendance at Statewide Program activities such as PreventX 2024, training courses or sessions, the CoPs and the webinar.

Data collected through participant feedback forms across all activities and aggregated for analysis show that an overwhelming majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements related to *knowledge and confidence* dimensions of Statewide Program participation.

- + Activities have deepened understandings of prevention and/or evidence-based practice (90%)
- + Activities have improved confidence to do the work of primary prevention (95%)

“ The most valuable aspect for me was hearing from a truly diverse range of panellists. It was good to hear common themes coming out in the conversations. It strengthened my understanding about how to message effectively. It was also great to think about messaging in different contexts: broad public campaigns, targeted campaigns, swaying community leaders including all levels of government. I have so much to think about, particularly how I can genuinely ensure that my work recognises and embeds intersectionality. So that the unheard voices are listened to.”

Participant at PreventX 2024

Strong relationships are pivotal to identifying and responding to workforce needs

During the year, Safe and Equal continued with the established practice of always striving to understand workforce needs first so that learning and support activities can be customised to meet identified needs.

Safe and Equal believes that relationships are key to gaining an up-to-date picture of the workforce. Ongoing interactions with Statewide Program participants are one aspect of this, in that they support active listening and careful attention to what is being said *during* activities rather than necessarily requiring an additional layer of assessment to be imposed on an already capacity-stretched workforce. In November 2023, Safe and Equal extended its role as a peak body to include full membership for organisations working in primary prevention. This has strengthened its relationships and interactions with a diverse workforce across the state.

Safe and Equal surfaced a number of workforce challenges via this approach. These included the realities of prevention practitioner isolation; community resistance to addressing the known drivers of violence; and the complexities of securing adequate leadership support for settings-based work. Safe and Equal also heard about the ongoing pressures generated by stakeholders to achieve immediate impacts or quick wins when real-world practice conditions – such as isolation, resistance and lack of leadership support – can make these difficult to achieve within unrealistic timeframes.

Once again, data collected through participant feedback forms across a number of activities show that an overwhelming majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements related to the *responsiveness of the Statewide Program* in meeting current workforce needs.

- + The themes or topics covered were relevant to prevention work (95%)
- + Attending today was time well spent (87%)

One other aspect to building an accurate picture of workforce needs is Safe and Equal's relationships with organisations or networks that support specific communities or settings prioritised for prevention action. During the year, Safe and Equal pursued purposeful partnerships and/or collaborative opportunities with Rainbow Health Australia (RHA), Zoe Belle Gender Collective (ZBGC), Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV), Sexual Assault Services Victoria, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Victoria Legal Aid through the Affirmative Consent Leadership Consortium, and The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services (the Men's Project).

Safe and Equal's partnership with The Men's Project is notable in this regard, in being intentionally sought and formed through a planned approach for shared endeavour. The structured partnership was pivotal in the successful co-design and co-delivery of a customised training package for the prevention workforce in Melbourne's west, which came about at the request of GenWest as lead partner for [Champions of the West: Improving equality and respect on the footy field](#). Both Safe and Equal and The Men's Project were known to one another prior to GenWest's approach to them, and had actually embarked on a process for formalising their ways of working together. Principles and practices found in their Partnership Agreement supported the partners to 'get cracking' on the design of the training in an open and collaborative manner that was imbued with trust, care and respect.

Safe and Equal's relationships with external specialist organisations also helped to improve its practices in delivering Statewide Program activities. For instance, consultation with ZBGC and RHA led to the development of a practical tip sheet that can support facilitators and trainers in responding to transphobia and transmisogyny when these arise in learning and support spaces. Consultation with WDV and its Experts by Experience panel was integral to informing the delivery of PreventX 2024 in that it ensured access, safety and inclusion considerations were built into planning from the start and not as an afterthought.

Momentum is building for positive change on the prevention workforce

Collective action is at the core of Safe and Equal's approach to strategic workforce development, and runs alongside the Statewide Program's focus on learning and support. During the year, Safe and Equal sought to catalyse collective action on workforce development whenever possible through the conversations, connections, partnerships and collaborations afforded by the Statewide Program.

As noted in this report, the Statewide Program continues to show strong signs of effectiveness at the level of individual practitioners participating in various activities. This year, the Statewide Program started showing strong indications of positive impact on the prevention workforce and wider prevention system.

There is a 'snow ball' effect building for collective action through structures convened by Safe and Equal, such as the Practitioner Reference Group (PRG) and Prevention Strategic Advisory Group (PSAG). These are dedicated structures for prevention stakeholders that provide spaces to discuss a range of matters, including workforce development and its progress in Victoria.

“ A year ago, Safe and Equal delivered the Affirmative Consent and Primary Prevention Practice webinar. Our organisation presented. The flow on from that has been a number of other organisations getting in touch to ask if we can deliver some training to support them in their work.”

PRG member

During the year, Safe and Equal gave input to the Victorian Government on the refresh of the [Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women Capability Framework](#) and the development of [Framing the Future: Second rolling action plan for Building from Strength: 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response](#). Safe and Equal prepared a [written submission](#) to the [Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2024–2026](#). Each of these contributions has served as moments to catalyse collective action for workforce development in the realms of prevention system policy and practice improvement.










Safe and Equal continued to align Statewide Program activities with other initiatives of the organisation, among them the Connecting Communities and Foundations for Action projects.

[Connecting Communities](#) is a partnership between MCWH and Safe and Equal. It offers a stand-alone program of learning and support for practitioners working with multicultural and/or faith-based communities to address family violence. The project was part of PreventX 2024 as a 90-minute deep dive, 'Communication for Connection: Prevention messaging for multicultural and faith communities.' The panel supported the Connecting Communities network to platform its experiences and insights as a unique part of Victoria's prevention workforce including through the launch of the project resource, [Communicating for Connection: Values-based messaging for primary prevention in multicultural and faith-based communities](#). The panel was also a valuable way to link the network to the broader workforce and create greater visibility for real-world intersectional practice.

Foundations for Action sought to strengthen the foundations for planning and implementing workforce development strategies for primary prevention in Victoria, by comprehensively describing the nature and diversity of the workforce. The project explored the organisations, roles, sectors, settings, communities and locations involved in prevention. As part of the project, Safe and Equal examined the evaluation and other data available through the Statewide Program. Foundations for Action has since been completed, and in the coming year will in turn inform the activities of the Statewide Program, and indeed the program and strategic directions of workforce development in Victoria's prevention system more broadly. The recently launched report, *Foundations for Action: Understanding the primary prevention workforce in Victoria*, is accessible through Safe and Equal's website.

What's working well and what could be improved?

As the third year of the Statewide Program drew to a close, Safe and Equal staff took the opportunity to participate in some honest reflection on what is working well and what could be improved going forward. These thoughts are summarised as follows.

WHAT'S WORKING WELL?	WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?
<p> Continuously identifying workforce needs through actively listening to the challenges of practitioners and customising Statewide Program learning and support activities.</p>	<p> Safe and Equal has heard requests through the year for more in-person opportunities to connect, share, learn and support, and will endeavour to provide more in-person opportunities in the coming year.</p> <p> Safe and Equal has heard the need for more CoP sessions per year, and will bring forward the start date of all CoPs to August 2024, and increase the number of sessions for each CoP to eight (from six).</p>
<p> Relationships with organisations or networks that support specific communities or settings prioritised for prevention action. Purposeful partnerships or collaborations to progress specific pieces of work.</p>	<p> Safe and Equal will continue to build relationships with external organisations or networks critical to progressing the Statewide Program and prevention workforce development more broadly.</p>
<p> Practitioners engaging with the Statewide Program are diversifying – particularly in relation to people working in settings outside of those historically associated with Safe and Equal, but not necessarily in relation to other diversity characteristics.</p>	<p> <i>Foundations for Action</i> reveals that people involved in community-led prevention and working on the intersecting drivers of violence do find it difficult to identify with the prevention workforce. They can feel disinclined to connect because their expertise is often undervalued and, at times, exploited. As such, they miss out on workforce development offerings.</p> <p> The same systems of exclusion and discrimination that operate in society filter to the level of workforces, and must be addressed to realise a prevention workforce that truly reflects our communities.</p> <p> Going forward, these findings lend support to Safe and Equal to extend its existing commitment in the Statewide Program to advocate for a strong and diverse primary prevention workforce.</p>

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This summary evaluation report has shown that the Statewide Program continues to engage well and effectively with Victoria's primary prevention workforce through its delivery of multi-pronged learning and support activities.

This summary evaluation report has shown that the Statewide Program continues to have a positive impact on practitioner knowledge, confidence, sense of professional identity and wellbeing – thereby equipping a vast segment of Victoria's prevention workforce with what it needs to know and supporting it to succeed.

This summary evaluation report has shown that the Statewide Program continues to be highly valued by practitioners for the opportunities it offers to connect, engage in conversations that matter, share practice challenges and successes, exchange information including practice tools, and collaborate with one another. Safe and Equal's relationships with Statewide Program participants, and with organisations or networks that support specific communities and settings, are factors contributing to this achievement.

This summary evaluation report has shown that Safe and Equal is aligning the Statewide Program with other workforce development initiatives, and is strengthening the organisation's role as a system lead through a multi-pronged approach to advocacy. This approach utilises existing prevention structures to progress strategic workforce development and practice improvements. Through these moments, Safe and Equal is building momentum for positive change on the prevention workforce as a vital part of Victoria's prevention system.

The coming year, 2024–2025, reflects the fourth year of the Statewide Program as it heads into its final two years to conclude by 2026. For the next 12 months, Safe and Equal will:

- + Start preparing for PreventX 2026 drawing on evaluation and other data collected for this year's national conference, including building on the successes of the in-person event.
- + Find a better balance between online and in-person modes for Statewide Program activities.
- + Continue to focus the Statewide Program on practitioner learning and support, and on collective action for Victoria's prevention workforce.
- + Commit to further diversifying the practitioner profile of people engaging with the Statewide Program and workforce development activity more broadly – guided by the ongoing learning from our programs and partnerships, the findings from *Foundations for Action* on the structural reasons for practitioner disconnection, and the priorities in *Framing the Future* to grow the size and diversity of the prevention workforce by 2026.

Safe and Equal acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.